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- 1 Heike Raphael-Hernandez and Shannon Steen, Eds. *AfroAsian encounters: Culture, History, Politics*. New York: New York University Press, 2006. xxiii + 342 p.
- 2 An overlooked, interdisciplinary, often innovative book, *Afroasian encounters: Culture, History, Politics* offers a collection of seventeen new essays related to the African-Asian intersections, cosmopolitanism and cross-cultural theories. In terms of emerging disciplines, we already had Atlantic studies (or "Trans-Atlantic studies"), an interdisciplinary approach which analyzes the multiple intersections between Europe, Africa and the Americas according to their many cultural, historical, social and political dimensions; we now see the acceleration of some new publications and research related to the numerous links between Africa and Asia. Moreover, AfroAsian Studies (as it is often spelled, in one word with a capital "A" in the beginning and also in the middle) examines as well the African and Asian diasporas outside these two continents, for instance in the Americas and the Caribbean.
- 3 In his foreword, Professor Vijay Prashad indicates as a landmark and probable starting point of AfroAsian Studies a book titled *The Color Curtain*, written in 1956 by African American author Richard Wright (1908-1960), who was inspired by the aftermath of the 1955 Bandung Conference in Indonesia, which gathered "representatives from twenty-nine newly liberated countries in Africa and Asia" (p. xi). However, in the wake of post-colonial studies, this new interdisciplinary field took some time to become well-known and recognized outside the broad discipline of ethnic studies, or even to coin its label of "AfroAsian Studies" (p. xv). In fact, as Vijay Prashad explains here: "scholarship on AfroAsian worlds emerged in the late 1970s" (p. xiv). Furthermore, one must remember that this whole reflection on AfroAsian Studies came into existence long before we began talking endlessly about globalization and cross-cultural theories. However, the analyses made before the 1960s were sometimes limited and biased. For example during the Cold War, the only interest for regions of the South hemisphere was, according to Prashad,

"for their potential for modernization and for alliances against the spread of communism" (p. xiv).

- 4 In the opening pages, Professors Heike Raphael-Hernandez and Shannon Steen argue that their edited book appears to be "the first interdisciplinary anthology to treat AfroAsian encounters" (p. 2). Their Introduction allows the two editors to focus on one particular dimension: "the mutual influence of and relationships between members of the African and Asian diasporas in the Americas" (p. 1). For instance in Chapter 2, Cynthia Tolentino compares how two very different writers — the African American author Richard Wright and an Asian American author named Jade Snow Wong (who wrote the autobiography *Fifth Chinese Daughter*, in 1945) — both understood their ethnic difference while living in the USA. Are the issues related to ethnicity and racism the same whenever one is either Black or Asian? Are these two different ways of being an American? To answer these, Tolentino refers mainly to the tools of sociology and in particular to urban sociologist Robert Park. What follows is a very interesting essay, despite its misleading title that does not carry the main ideas of her text (the chapter's title is: "Crossings in Prose: Jade Snow Wong and the Demand for a new kind of expert"). In my view, "the influence of sociological studies of Negroes and Orientals on Asian American strategies of self-definition and ideologies of professionalism" (p. 35) would have been a more appropriate chapter title. In fact, these are the words used by Cynthia Tolentino herself to present her main argument in her chapter.
- 5 While all essays can not be presented here, I will focus on two of the most representative ones, written by Eleanor Ty and Fred Ho (chapters 3 and 16 respectively). Concentrating on "Asian Canadians and African Canadians as Visible Minorities," Eleanor Ty provides a detailed mapping of visible minorities in Canada (as opposed to, say, the linguistic minorities such as the francophones), using history and ethnicity, then referring to some specific cases like the long-settled black population in eastern Canada (Halifax, Nova Scotia) and the Chinese immigrants set in British Columbia since 1858 (p. 54). Even though I would disagree in some points with the author, Eleanor Ty brings forward the pros and cons regarding the unique Canadian policy of "Multiculturalism within a Bilingual Framework" (p. 57). Her essay proves that studying Asian and African minorities in the Canadian context can differ a lot from the ongoing issues in the USA or elsewhere. In another misnamed chapter, Fred Ho examines how the Hong Kong martial art movies have been reappropriated by Hollywood during the 1990s, following Bruce Lee's milestone feature 1973 film *Enter the Dragon*, in which white characters are beaten by the oriental fighters (p. 304). Then, Ho discusses his own creative and performance works in martial arts.
- 6 The remaining chapters should not be overlooked since they bring out some of the most interesting discussions in the book: for example, in his afterword and while applying a cross-cultural approach centered on the "Black Pacific," Gary Okiihiro compares early 20th century Hawaiian music to blues (remember the song "Hula Blues", by Sol Hoopii ?), and then highlights the impact of reggae music on some of the Hawaiian music of the 1970s, focusing on influences and styles (p. 325).
- 7 As a sign of the possible similitudes between the authors, some chapter conclusions could apply to many others, for instance when Shannon Steen argues (in her chapter titled "Racing American Modernity") that "racial identities are historically located and inderpinned by attempts at national self-conception" (p. 182), adding that "conceptions

of 'race' are formulated within the relationship between domestic and international racial mappings" (p. 182).

- 8 In my opinion, *Afroasian encounters: Culture, History, Politics* is one of the most interesting interdisciplinary books I have ever read so far during the last year. It could possibly attract a wide readership in many disciplines, and especially graduate students. We find several chapters dealing with ethnicity, sociology, international relations, film studies (in three essays), American studies, Literature, Popular Music, and Cultural Studies. Despite its originality and admirable interdisciplinary approach, however, my main quibble with the book would have to be about the index, that is not detailed enough and does not include enough entries (pp. 337-342), if one takes into consideration the richness and variety of topics, ideas, concepts and names covered. For instance, there is no entry on "Canada" in the index, even though this country is mentioned in many sections (on pp. 9, 50-60, 138, 141) and two contributors of the volumes are affiliated with Canadian universities. Quite a few other topics, regions, and categories that are discussed in the book are also missing from the index: entries on "Africans-Americans", "Asians-Americans," "Carribeans," and "India" should have been included. Furthermore, several concepts related to the self and identity are discussed here and there but do not appear in the index either. This oversight limits the possibilities of the volume considerably for its efficient use as a tool for research.

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